United Nations

Centre against Apartheid

Notes and Documents

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21 MARCH 1990: INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY RENEWS ITS COMMITMENT TO ERADICATE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND APARTHEID

[Note: The United Nations Special Committee against Apartheid, jointly with the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, held a solemn meeting on 21 March 1990 in observance of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

On this occasion, the international community also celebrated the independence of Namibia which has now been admitted as the one hundredth and sixtieth State Member of the United Nations.

This issue, which is published at the request of the Special Committee, contains excerpts of statements made at the meeting.]

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I. MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, DELIVERED BY H.E. MR. LIONEL ALEXANDER HURST (ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA), VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Today's observance is of varying importance. First, it marks the thirtieth anniversary of the brutal massacre in 1960 at Sharpeville, South Africa, where the legitimate aspirations for freedom, equality and justice of the black South African population were nipped for those innocent peaceful demonstrators who were killed at Sharpeville. What those martyrs of Sharpeville were striving for are the principles already enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Secondly, 20 years ago, the United Nations established the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which has, since its inception, been in the forefront of the international resolve to eliminate even the last vestiges of racial discrimination.

Finally, this day marks a historic and unique event: a great victory for the Namibian people and for the international community. Today we join the Namibian people in celebrating their long overdue independence. As is eloquently written in the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, its people have resolved to live in a democratic society based on, among other things, "the right of the individual to life, liberty and to the pursuit of happiness, regardless of race, colour, ethnic origin, sex or religion, creed or social or economic status".

The very independence and guaranteed self-determination that has been achieved by the Namibian people is still a goal for the oppressed people of South Africa. There is still a long way to go until a climate is established that is conducive to national reconciliation and a negotiated settlement in that country, viz. the conditions being created for the demise of racial discrimination.

Until the elimination of apartheid, the most flagrant vestige of the practice of racial discrimination, has been achieved, the international community will be determined to maintain and sustain concerted and effective pressure on Pretoria, as well as assistance and support for the oppressed people of South Africa as agreed on in the Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa, adopted by the General Assembly at its sixteenth special session on 14 December 1990 (resolution S-16(1)). The day will certainly come when the black people of South Africa, like their sisters and brothers in Namibia, can point to a new constitution that guarantees all people their fundamental rights under a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. The international community must continue to strive towards that noble aim, until the democratic transformation of South Africa has been won.

II. MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS, DELIVERED BY THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL, CENTRE AGAINST APARTHEID

Few practices are more repugnant to the values cherished by civilized man

than those of racial discrimination. The United Nations, since its inception, has contributed consistently to the elimination of such practices. It has worked with vigor to support social change to end them in all parts of the world.

Today's commemoration coincides with the accession to independence of Namibia as a State free from racial discrimination and reflecting the ideals of the United Nations. Our Organization can be justly proud of the part it has played in this process.

In South Africa, we welcome the release of Nelson Mandela and other South African nationalist leaders who have served long terms of imprisonment for their steadfast opposition to apartheid. Their release has been accompanied by the lifting of restrictions on the activities of anti-apartheid organizations within South Africa, notably the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC). While these developments have been welcomed, more remains to be done to enable South Africa to move towards the establishment of a non-racial society where people of all races can be assured of equal rights under the law.

It is my hope that the South African Government will press ahead with the normalization of the political process so that a national dialogue on the country's political future can take place with the full participation of the acknowledged representatives of the people of South Africa. To this end, I again urge the Government of South Africa not to delay lifting the state of emergency and to release all remaining political prisoners.

I also urge the international community to lend its fullest support to all those who are engaged in building a new South Africa in line with the will of its people.

United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, including the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Commission on Human Rights and the Special Committee against Apartheid, have endeavoured to be true to this commitment. The efforts of Member States, non-governmental organizations and citizens of goodwill have been no less important in our collective resolve.

III. STATEMENT BY MR. ABDALLA SALE AL-ASHTAL (DEMOCRATIC YEMEN), PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On this day, the thirtieth anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, the members of the Security Council join with the rest of the international community in remembering all who are or have been the victims of racial discrimination, and not least those who have suffered from the policies of apartheid. The commemoration of the International Day in 1990 takes on special importance as it coincides with the coming into being of the independent State of the Republic of Namibia and the realization of one of the most ardently sought goals of the people of Namibia, a goal that has been fully shared and supported by the international community, which has been

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committed to its attainment throughout the life of the United Nations.

Since the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960, the Security Council has repeatedly condemned the abhorrent policy of apartheid of the Government of South Africa, which institutionalizes racial discrimination and is an affront to human dignity, and has called upon the Government of South Africa to bring it to an end.

The Security Council has reaffirmed that the policy of apartheid is a crime against the conscience and dignity of man, the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and seriously disturbs international peace and security. It has expressed its support for, and solidarity with, all those struggling for the elimination of apartheid and racial discrimination and all victims of violence and repression by the Government of South Africa.

The Council has reaffirmed that only the total elimination of apartheid and the establishment in South Africa of a free, united and democratic society on the basis of universal suffrage can lead to a solution, and it has demanded the immediate eradication of apartheid as the necessary step towards the establishment of a non-racial democratic society based on self-determination and majority rule through the full and free exercise of universal suffrage by all the people in a united and non-fragmented South Africa.

It is to be hoped that the present auspicious international climate and recent positive developments in South Africa will lead to the abolition of apartheid. The members of the Council are firmly committed to doing all in their power, consonant with the Charter of the United Nations, to contribute to the enjoyment by all South Africans of the rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and join in encouraging the South African people to unite around the negotiating table and decide their own non-racial and democratic future.

IV. STATEMENT BY H.E. GUENNADI OUDOVENKO (UKRAINIAN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC), ACTING CHAIRMAN OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID

The International Day coincides this year with the thirtieth anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa. On 21 March 1960, South African police nipped the hopes of innocent and peaceful demonstrators against the infamous pass-laws for peace, freedom and justice. Sixty-nine persons, including women and children, were slaughtered in cold blood and many more were wounded.

To remember these victims this very day is most fitting and of special importance. As neighbouring Namibia celebrates today its independence, it stands as an example for the will and the commitment of its people to liberate themselves from South African occupation and apartheid rule. The independence of Namibia and the elimination of apartheid have long been two fronts of the struggle. Success on one front, nevertheless, should not give cause to relax pressure on the other.

Today, we also mark the twentieth anniversary of the establishment by the United Nations General Assembly of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The United Nations observes this International Day every year to renew its commitment to the struggle for the eradication of racial discrimination. To the international community, the abolition of apartheid is a major task in that struggle. Racial equality and freedom are principles that are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It stands to reason that in South Africa, there can be no peace while the overwhelming majority of its people are deliberately deprived of their human rights and excluded from the mainstream of the country's political, economic and social life.

On 14 December 1989, the General Assembly, at its sixteenth special session, adopted the historic Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences for Southern Africa by consensus, on measures to be taken in order to create a favourable climate conducive to negotiations and on the process and objectives of such negotiations towards an early eradication of apartheid. This Declaration reflected the world's support to the South African people in their effort to build a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa.

Since the adoption of the Declaration, several positive developments have taken place: President F. W. De Klerk announced on 2 February 1990 the lifting of the ban on the political organizations, including ANC and PAC, the release of certain political prisoners, the suspension of the imposition of the death penalty and the relaxation of media restrictions.

On 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela was released. His release is a significant step forward in ending apartheid through peaceful means.

The Special Committee welcomed these measures and reaffirmed that the appropriate climate for negotiations can only be created when the remaining measures, as set forth in the United Nations declaration on apartheid, are implemented, namely: the release of all political prisoners; the return to their homes of those in exile; the lifting of the state of emergency; the removal of troops from the townships; and the repeal of repressive legislation, such as the Internal Security Act.

At a meeting held on 9 March 1990, the Special Committee reviewed the situation in South Africa and the international response. The Special Committee came to the conclusion that it was entirely premature for any change of policy by the international community towards the apartheid régime. The relaxation of sanctions would undermine the process towards democratic change in South Africa. Sanctions remained the most effective and peaceful weapon to the international community for the elimination of apartheid.

Indeed, the United Nations declaration calls upon Member States, among other things, to step up all-round support for the opponents of apartheid and to use concerted effective measures in applying pressure to ensure the speedy

end of apartheid in that racist society. As never before, it is imperative to maintain and sustain concerted pressure aimed at encouraging the creation of a climate conducive to national reconciliation and a negotiated settlement in South Africa.

On behalf of the Special Committee, I urge all Governments, parliamentarians, congressmen, anti-apartheid movements, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies, trade union organizations, mass media, student and youth organizations, as well as all men and women of conscience in the world, to lend their renewed and unflinching support to the struggle against apartheid by mobilizing all possible action for the speedy implementation of the United Nations declaration.

V. STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. TOM OBALEH KARGBO (SIERRA LEONE), ACTING CHAIRMAN OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

The year 1990 is marked by three events of major importance: the independence of Namibia, which is being celebrated today, the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre and the commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (General Assembly resolution 1515 (XV) of 14 December 1960).

These three events underscore the task bestowed upon the Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples and the Special Committee against Apartheid by the Charter of the United Nations and the General Assembly, to defend the rights of peoples everywhere to self-determination and to enjoy the basic human rights, freedom and dignity.

In 1960, the tragedy of Sharpeville spurred our determination and strengthened our resolve to eliminate from the face of the earth the scourges of racism and racial discrimination, which run contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Today, thirty years later, this determination and this resolve have paid sizeable returns. In effect, important developments are taking place in South Africa, which we hope will lead to an early and total eradication of all racial laws, as well as to the immediate lifting of all political and constitutional restrictions such as the Group Areas Act and the Internal Security Act, bringing us one step closer to the total dismantlement of apartheid.

The release of South Africa's heroic freedom fighter, the leader of ANC, Mr. Nelson Mandela, and his recent visit to Lusaka, as well as the prior release of other political prisoners, carry with them the hope of further progress towards the repeal of all banning and repressive laws in South Africa.

We believe that any negotiations between the Pretoria régime and the

peoples of South Africa on a new constitutional order should be based on the principles [as contained in the Harare Declaration adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Southern Africa of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on 21 August 1989].

But, however positive the development in South Africa, we must bear in mind our goal of the total dismantlement of apartheid in all its forms and in all its manifestations. Thus, the international campaign against apartheid must not only be maintained, it must be intensified. The sanctions against South Africa must not be lifted until the Pretoria régime engages in serious and genuine talks with the whole population of South Africa, leading to the dismantlement of apartheid and the creation of a non-racial, unitary and fully democratic nation.

We are celebrating today the independence of Namibia, an independence richly deserved by a courageous and determined nation. We call upon all peace-loving countries to offer Namibia all assistance and all help in tackling its outstanding problems.

We must continue to invite all Governments and international organizations to associate themselves closely with our work, so that this decade may see the end of colonialism, apartheid and racial discrimination.

VI. STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON (SWEDEN), CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OF TRUSTEES OF THE UNITED NATIONS TRUST FUND FOR SOUTH AFRICA

We commemorate today the 1960 massacre at Sharpeville of innocent black South Africans demonstrating in defence of their fundamental human rights and in defiance of the system of apartheid. In paying tribute to them today, we renew our pledge to uphold the cause for which they made their supreme sacrifice.

Today also marks another important event, and indeed a historic achievement. After decades of occupation, the people of Namibia have at last won their independence, guided successfully to this goal by the United Nations. The struggle for majority rule and independence in southern Africa today scored a long awaited victory in Namibia. And, what is more, it has provided South Africans and the rest of the world with a powerful demonstration of peaceful, democratic and negotiated change.

In South Africa, too, the winds of change have gained strength. The united struggle of the opponents of apartheid together with international pressure has produced results. The South African Government has recognized the need for a negotiated settlement. It has lifted the ban on political organizations, released Nelson Mandela and some other political prisoners.

However, it has not yet shown itself ready to abolish the underpinnings of the apartheid system. The South African Government must now take the remaining steps before negotiations to create a democratic, non-racist and

united South Africa can begin. The measures to be taken are spelled out in the United Nations Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa, adopted by consensus on 14 December 1989 at the sixteenth special session of the General Assembly: the state of emergency should be lifted, security legislation such as the Internal Security Act should be repealed; all political prisoners should be released; and all political exiles should be able to return safely home. Until these steps are taken, effective international pressure on South Africa must be maintained.

Thus, while the main concern of the international community is focused on ways to bring about a political settlement in South Africa, we should not underestimate the significance of humanitarian assistance to the victims of apartheid. Such assistance is not a substitute for, but a complement to, political, diplomatic, economic and other urgent actions.

It is therefore crucial at this juncture that generous contributions should be given to sustain the humanitarian, legal and relief assistance provided by the United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa. The Secretary-General has recently appealed to the Member States for contributions to the Fund.

On behalf of the Committee of Trustees of the Fund, I join in this appeal and urge all Governments, organizations and individuals to consider today's pressing circumstances and make every effort to live up to the expectations of the many victims of apartheid and the majority of the South African people.

VII. STATEMENT BY H.E. MR. GEORGE D. LAMPTEY (GHANA), CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in 1990 coincides with the thirtieth anniversary of the tragedy that was the massacre at Sharpeville. This period also coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the coming into being of the first international mechanism for the monitoring worldwide of the observance of a species of human rights - the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Today, part of the battle is ended. The long struggle of the people of Namibia for freedom, independence and equality has been won. Nelson Mandela is no longer incarcerated, and with his release has come the unleashing of an irreversible tide that could sweep away the foundations of apartheid, and bring in its wake a new society in which all are equal and in which freedom and justice might reign.

But let us be realistic in our assessment of the situation in southern Africa. Let us be firm in our resolve to support materially, diplomatically and morally the long suffering people of South Africa as they march steadily to their inevitable destiny of real freedom.

But, beyond apartheid lies the tragedy of racism and racial discrimination in our world. Forty-five years after the world pronounced in the Charter of the United Nations its revulsion at the racial excesses that

constituted an essential element in the tragedy of the Second World War, we continue to see variants of racism and racial discrimination afflicting the peoples of the United Nations.

The United Nations, under whose aegis the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was elaborated, adopted and ratified, must see its responsibility as going beyond the treaty to the prescriptions on human rights in the Charter. It is beholden to all to ensure that our progress is sustained.

VIII. STATEMENT BY THE CO-ORDINATOR OF THE SECOND DECADE TO COMBAT RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Today we mark the thirtieth anniversary of the massacre of Sharpeville and we honour the memory of other freedom fighters who have died in the continuing struggle against apartheid and racial discrimination.

Today, we also have reason to celebrate, as the observance of the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination coincides with the day on which Namibia becomes independent. The peaceful settlement of the Namibian question has gone together with the knowledge that the racial discrimination entrenched in the system of apartheid grossly violates one of the basic principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

Three years after the establishment of the world Organization, the intrinsic bond between peace, justice and human rights was unmistakably proclaimed by the General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And article 1 of that Declaration proclaims that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights".

Today, more than ever, we find this vision vindicated by history. The recent steps undertaken by the South African authorities, and the release of Mr. Nelson Mandela after 27 years of imprisonment, have increased the hope that the demolition of the apartheid system and its replacement with a non-racist and democratic State will be attained.

The Declaration on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa adopted by the General Assembly at at its sixteenth special session on 14 December 1989, expresses the international community's response to these expectations.

At this time we commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the proclamation by the General Assembly of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which is the first legally binding instrument that obliges States parties to condemn racial discrimination, segregation and apartheid and to undertake to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races, and to prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of this nature.

The year 1990 also marks 20 years of activities of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination established under the International Convention, the first treaty-monitoring body in the framework of the United Nations.

While we stand today at a truly historic and creative moment in international life, the human rights record of our age is stained by summary executions and arrest, by disappearances and widespread torture, by the killings of unarmed demonstrators, and detention for reasons of belief and conviction, by hunger, diseases and human misery. These assaults upon the most fundamental notions of justice and human dignity cannot leave us indifferent. They are assaults upon each and every one of us.

Today there are numerous mechanisms at the disposal of the United Nations investigating and subsequently reporting on the violations of human rights existing in certain countries, territories or situations. But more needs to be done, including under the United Nations Programme of Action for the Second Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination in order to attain the objectives laid down therein.

Human dignity, worth and well-being are the heart of the experiment in international co-operation which is the United Nations. Thus, in honouring the memory of all the freedom fighters who died in the combat against racism, racial discrimination and segregation and apartheid, we commit ourselves again to the principles and objectives of our Organization.

IX. STATEMENT BY MR. ZEHDI LABIB TERZI, PERMANENT OBSERVER FOR PALESTINE TO THE UNITED NATIONS

We observe this day, the victory of peoples over the evil of racism, the victory of peoples over the crime of apartheid and all other forms of racial discrimination. In our struggle we have paid a high price and we are still paying that price - in the blood and human suffering of the victims of colonialism, apartheid and all other forms of racism and racial discrimination. We recall here, after 30 years, the massacre of non-whites at Sharpeville. We recall always as Palestinians the massacre of Palestinian Semites in Palestine and other places. We can still suffer from the practices and policies of racial discrimination. One such form is the institutional racism and racial discrimination that the policies and practices of the occupying power Israel is practising against my people in the occupied territories. Yet, we see today the fruits of the struggle of the Namibian people, so maybe we can also celebrate the victory of the Namibian people against colonial rule, against those who betrayed the mandate that was given to them in this context.

We praise the struggle of the Namibian people but we cannot forget that the United Nations has also helped to a great extent in the realization of what the Namibian people are achieving. The international community had a role and it did play that role very fruitfully and positively, in the struggle of the Namibian people.

Today, we also share in celebrating the release of our comrade-in-arms, a freedom fighter, Nelson Mandela, the symbol of the struggle of the South African people in their struggle to achieve and exercise their inalienable rights to life, to live in peace and to self-determination. The process has started but it will continue because we are sure that the heroic peoples of South Africa will not relent until they have achieved the right and their aim, to live in a democratic country - a democratic South Africa.

We cannot forget that Mr. Mandela came out with those beautiful words: "I have often heard the expression, that history is not made by kings and generals but by the masses of the people." It is the masses of the people of South Africa, of all population groups, it is the people of Zambia, it is the people of the front-line States, it is the people of the world, who are today making history and that is why today we feel that in the course of our struggle we are on the verge of a breakthrough.

X. STATEMENT BY MR. NATHANIEL MASEMOLA, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS OF SOUTH AFRICA

We are gathered together on this historic occasion to honour the memory of the martyrs of Sharpeville. As the world knows, their peaceful protest was met with bullets in their backs. Sixty-nine died and hundreds were severely wounded. Survivors carry their scars to this day. We salute them. We condemn the apartheid state that killed and maimed them. The freedom torch they lit has been handed down through the years to a new generation of freedom fighters. But, of course, times have changed and a climate that is more favourable to the freedom for which they died now prevails.

Internationally there is a thaw in East-West relations. Namibia, the last classical colony in Africa, is free at last. We join the international community in saluting them.

The defeat of apartheid Namibia augurs well for its defeat inside South Africa itself. The Pretoria régime is at last showing signs of a readiness to talk to the authentic leaders of our people. After 28 years of imprisonment Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Wilton Mkhwayi, Mohamed Kathrada, Elias Motsoaledi, Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba are now free to take their proper places of leadership among our people. Our organization, ANC, and. ther political organizations have been unbanned. The state of emergency has been modified in part. Twenty-two days from now, on 11 April, a high-powered ANC delegation led by Nelson Mandela will meet F. W. De Klerk and his team at Cape Town to discuss the removal of obstacles to negotiation aimed at breaking the apartheid deadlock. In this regard our demands are clear.

Simply stated, the régime must withdraw its soldiers and their heavy armour from our defenceless townships. We cannot negotiate under duress or military threats from the South African offensive (not defensive) forces. Secondly, this artificial state of emergency must now go. We must be free to consult our people across the length and breadth of our country on the burning

political issues of the day. Thirdly, the remaining 3,000 odd political prisoners must be freed at once. They, together with the rest of us, need to consult our constituents before any negotiations can take place. Only such comprehensive consultations can give legitimacy to the results of future negotiations with Pretoria. Fourthly, Pretoria must stop all political trials and all political executions. We cannot sit down to negotiate when across the road in death row our comrades are being executed. Fifthly, a general amnesty must be granted to all exiles to enable them to return home to participate in the negotiations. No serious negotiations can take place with Pretoria without the full participation of Mr. Oliver R. Tambo, our President, and his colleagues in exile.

Once these five pre-conditions are met, negotiations will begin in earnest between ANC and other forces of democracy on the one hand, and the Pretoria régime on the other. Negotiations when they begin must be about the total abolition or dismantling of apartheid and, logically, the modalities for the transfer of total State power from the minority to the majority, without prejudice to the rights of the minority, unquestionably a Government of the majority of the people and for the benefit of the majority of the people. Translated into legal terms this means that the tri-cameral parliament must go; Bantustans must be abolished and our people there re-integrated, as is their natural right, into a free post-apartheid South Africa; the obnoxious so-called Natives Lands Acts of 1913 and 1936, supplemented by the Group Areas Act and various Resettlement Acts, must be repealed; Bantu education which has sought to warp and distort the minds of our people these many years must go; indeed, all apartheid laws enacted especially since May 1948 must be repealed. On the ashes of the apartheid state must be built a new unified, unitary, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic state and society of equal citizens who will have no regard to skin colour, race, religion, status, origin, class, sex, etc. of their fellow human beings.

We invite our white compatriots to join us in building a new political, constitutional, economic, social and cultural order based on these universal principles.

XI. STATEMENT BY MR. COUNT PIETERSEN, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PAN AFRICANIST CONGRESS OF AZANIA

We have assembled here once more on this solemn occasion to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the massacre of unarmed and defenceless Africans at Sharpeville and Langa in racist South Africa on 21 March 1960, a day which the United Nations and the international community have since 1966 observed as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The annual observance by the Special Committee against Apartheid has greatly contributed to focusing international attention on the plight of our people and the legitimacy of our struggle for national liberation and self-determination.

Despite the unrest and harassment by the racist police and their agents

country-wide, meetings are being held in Azania to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of the positive action campaign of PAC that resulted in the massacres at Sharpeville and Langa on 21 March 1960. That is an indication once more of the determination of the oppressed people in Azania to achieve their freedom through the only means left to them. The shooting at Sharpeville demonstrated that peaceful means could never work against a ruthless racist régime in our country.

PAC appreciates the solidarity shown by the international community by annually observing 21 March and by annually contributing to the United Nations Trust Fund for South Africa and the United Nations Trust Fund for Publicity against Apartheid.

The dispossessed people of Azania have a long and proud history of military struggle, particularly against the hated pass laws which were first introduced in racist South Africa in 1809. It is a fact of history that, at its first national conference held at Soweto on 19 and 20 December 1959, a decision was taken to challenge the obnoxious pass laws at the beginning of 1960. It was the founder-President of PAC, Mangaliso Sobukwe, who chose and announced 21 March 1960 as the day of reckoning. This was part of a deliberately designed unfolding programme of action of PAC, which was subsequently followed by the launching of armed struggle in 1961, and the Soweto uprising of 1960 and 1976 which led to the notorious Bethal secret trial of our national President and 17 other leaders of PAC.

Prior to the 21 March 1960 PAC-led campaign there were other anti-pass campaigns. But, the PAC-led 21 March 1960 campaign was qualitatively and quantitatively different from past anti-pass campaigns. Mr. Sobukwe, the PAC founder-President, was the first African political leader in modern times to tell the oppressor that the dispossessed people of Azania did not recognize the status quo and therefore would offer no defence and pay no fines. PAC called upon the African masses to leave their hated passes at home and surrender themselves at the nearest police station for arrest. In Sharpeville, in response to the call of PAC, 9,000 people converged on the police station. According to a Commission report the crowd was not hostile nor did it carry sticks or stones. But, at 12.15 pm, police reinforcements arrived. A few minutes later, the police started shooting. Sixty-nine people were shot and killed, including 8 women and 10 children, most of them shot in the back while running away from the police. A further 180 Africans were wounded.

To us, 21 March 1960 will always be remembered as a day in the history of our struggle which strengthened the masses of our people to wage their struggle further by all means necessary for national liberation and self-determination.

Courtesy of Notes and Documents